

**A STUDY ON CUSTOMER AWARENESS TOWARDS SELECTION OF ORGANIC FOOD
PRODUCT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE IN DHARMAPURI**

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ABSTRACT

The market of organic products is growing as the number of people willing to consume organic food and consumer preference towards organic food products is ever increasing. The promotion of organic food products constitutes an important option not only for producers, government and consumers but also to respond to societies' desire for higher food quality and food production that is less damaging to environment systems and improve the quality of life; this makes the study of consumer preferences highly important. The main purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing consumer preferences toward organic food products. The target population in this research includes consumers of Dharmapuri city . By making use of convenience sampling method 93 respondents have been selected. Data required for the study have been collected with the help of questionnaire. Organic food considered as healthy product and it is more preferred by the green consumers. The research result suggest that Government and social organizations have to promote organic farming at the households among general public and to take necessary steps for creating a regulatory system for authenticated organic certification and labeling in order to build-up the trust and confidence in consuming organic food products.

Keywords: Organic Product, green consumers, convenience sampling, social organizations, authenticated organic certification.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years, the American public has become increasingly concerned with the safety and quality of their food, leading them to question conventional agricultural practices.

This interest in safety, paired with growing concerns about the environment and sustainability ,has led to a large increase in demand for organic food products (Stevens-Gammon Huang, & Lin,2007).As the demand for organic food increases, so does the cropland devoted to organic food production. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), certified organic cropland doubled between 1992 and 1997; from 650,000 to 1.3 million acres (Dmitri & Greene,2002). Organic cropland is continually increasing and in 2005 there were 1.7 million acres of organic cropland (0.5 percent of total U.S. cropland) and 2.3 million acres of organic range land and pasture (0.5 percent of total U.S. range land and pasture). Also in 2005, all 50 States in the U.S. had some certified organic farmland for the first time (Economic Research Service, 2002).Organic food sales saw a 500 percent increase between 1994 and 1999. In 2000, for the first time ever, more organic food was purchased in conventional

supermarkets than any other venue, such as farmers markets and natural food stores. Approximately 7.8 billion dollars was spent on organic food and an estimated 50 percent of that (approximately 3.9 billion dollars) was spent at conventional retail outlets or supermarkets (Dmitri & Greene, 2002). More recently, in 2005, organic food sales totaled 13.8 billion dollars or 2.5 percent of the retail food market according to the Organic Trade Association, (OTA) (OTA, 2006). As organic food becomes more accessible through neighborhood supermarkets and the demand continues to rise, the need to study consumers' perceptions and knowledge becomes increasingly valuable. This study is also aimed at determining the reasoning behind the buying decisions and perceptions that college students have towards organic foods. Research has found that the majority of consumers view organically grown food products as "safer" or "less risky" when compared to conventionally grown food (Williams & Ham mitt, 2002). For example, in William sand Hammett study in 2002, approximately 700 organic and conventional food buyers were surveyed on what they thought the risk of death was from pesticide residue on conventionally grown food. Survey respondents estimated that between 50 and 200 people per million die each year from pesticide residue on food. This rate is not far from the annual mortality risk from motor vehicle accidents in the United States (Williams & Hammett, 2002). Demand for organic produce continues to increase and so does the cropland devoted to its production. By exploring college students' knowledge and perceptions towards organic food, farmers and ranchers will be able to better meet the market's demands. In this study, college students will be used as the sample because they have already been living on their own and have needed to make choices about what food they buy. They are also the next largest demographic that will soon have families and therefore potential, if not already current organic food consumers. This study will also explore the effects of these perceptions and knowledge of organic foods on their buying habits. Understanding what influences college students food buying decisions, will provide information to farmers and ranchers to communicate more effectively about their products and hopefully keep demands met while helping agriculture to remain a strong, viable industry

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Primary Objectives

- ❖ To study consumer preference towards selection of organic food product.

Secondary Objectives

- ❖ To find out the factors that influences the consumers in choosing organic food products.
- ❖ Factors that influences the consumer buying decision towards organic food products.
- ❖ To find out the consumer satisfaction level towards selection of organic food products.

Scope of the study

Organic food play a significant role in the health and general well being of the common public by minimizing their health risks and disease it increases their health level. organic products have gained importance as the world look for ways to reduce the junk foods which cause adverse health condition

Limitation of the study

The study is limited to the consumers preferring organic foods in Dharmapuri. The accuracy of the analysis and conclusion drawn entirely depends upon the reliability of the information provided by the common public.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

Research design is the first and foremost step in methodology adopted and undertaking research study. It is overall plan for the collection and analysis of data in the research project. Thus it is an organized,

systematic approach to be formulation, implementation and control of research project. Infected a well planned and well balanced research design guards against collection of irrelevant data and achieves the result in the best possibility way.

Source of data : The study is based on both primary and secondary data.

Primary data is collected from the customers of organic food product through questionnaire.

Secondary data is collected from the, articles, and internet.

A sample design is a definite plan for obtaining a sample from a given population

Consumers of organic food products

The sample size is 93 and all the respondents were chosen from Dharmapuri

Sampling method used for collecting primary data is convenience sampling method

A convenience sample is a type of non probability sampling method where the sample is taken from a group of people easy to contact or to reach.

Method of Data Collection

The method used for collecting data is through questionnaire. Questionnaire provides the most speedy and simple technique of gathering data about groups of individual scattered in a wide and extended field. In this method, a questionnaire form is sent usually by post to the persons concerned, with a request to answer the questions and return the questionnaire.

Tools for Analysis

Tools and techniques in research are the satisfaction methods of collection, analysis, interpretation, presentation, and organization of data. Statistics provides numerical tools and techniques to analyze the data and interpret the results of the analysis.

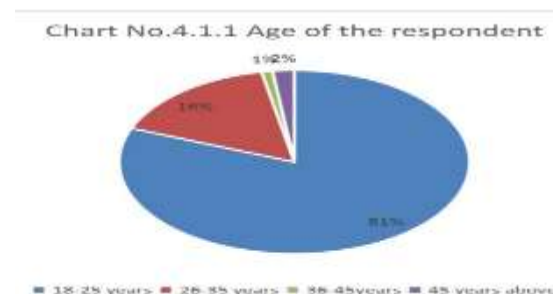
In my study I have used the following tools for the analysis of collected data:

- ❖ Percentage analysis
- ❖ Chi-square

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS : AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

S. No	Age	No. of Respondent	Percent
1	18-25 years	75	81
2	26-35 years	15	16
3	36-45 years	1	1
4	45 years above	2	2
Total		93	100



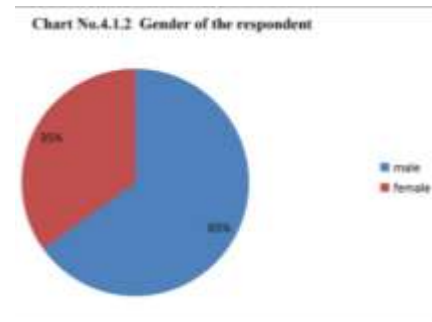
INTERPRETATION:

According to the table 80.6 Percentage respondents were 18-25 years ,16.1 percentage respondents were 26-35 years,1.1 percentage respondents were 36-45 years ,2.2 percentage respondents were above 45 years

GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTS

Gender of the Respondents

S. No	Gender	No. of Respondents	Percent
1	Male	60	65
2	Female	33	35
TOTAL		93	100

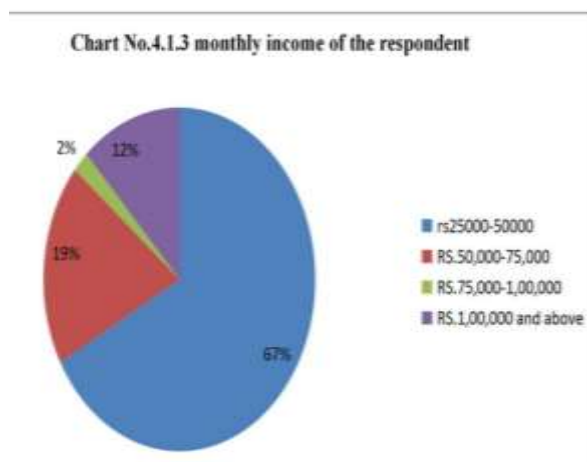


INTERPRETATION

According to the table 64.5 percentage respondents were male and 35.5 percentage respondents were female.

MONTHLY INCOME OF THE RESPONDENTS

S. No	Monthly Income	No. of Respondents	Percent
1	RS.25,000-50,000	62	67
2	RS.50,000-75,000	18	19
3	RS.75,000-1,00,000	2	2
4	RS.1,00,000 and Above	11	12
Total		93	100



INTERPRETATION

According to the table 66.7 percentage respondents were RS.25,000-50,000, 19.4 percentage respondents were RS.50,000-75,000 and 2.2 percentage respondents were RS.75,000-1,00,000 and 11.8 percentage respondents were RS.1,00,000 and above.

CHI-SQUARE TEST

To test the relationship between Age of the respondents and the level of the customer preference towards organic food products. Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no association between the age of the respondents and the level of the customer preference towards organic food products

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is an association between the age of the Respondents and the level of the customer preference towards organic food products

Level of satisfaction Age	Satisfied	Highly Satisfied	Low Satisfied	Not Satisfied	total
18-25 years	45	22	6	2	75
26-35 years	8	7	0	0	15
36-45 years	1	0	0	0	1
45 years and above	1	1	0	0	2
TOTAL	55	30	6	2	93

Calculated value chi-square value	Degree of freedom (No. Of row -1)× (No. Of column-1)	Probability level	Critical chi-square value
4.007	9	0.05	15.92

INTERPRETATION

Since the calculated value ,4.007 is lesser than the critical chi- square value 15.92 , we accept the null hypothesis hence, there is no an association between the age of the customers and the respondents level of preference towards selection of organic food product

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTION**FINDINGS**

- ❖ Majority of the respondents belong to the age of 18-25 years
- ❖ Majority of the respondents are male
- ❖ Majority of the respondents has knowledge about the organic food products
- ❖ Majority of the respondents feel organic food products to be more expensive.
- ❖ Majority of the respondents are satisfied with organic food products
- ❖ Majority of the respondents buying organic food products once in a week
- ❖ Majority of the respondents agree that organic food products are high quality
- ❖ Majority of the respondents are aware about organic food product for about 1 -3years
- ❖ Majority of the respondents think about organic food products is chemical free
- ❖ Majority of the respondents believe that organic food products are healthier
- ❖ Majority of the respondents buying organic food products is strongly agree

SUGGESTIONS

This study is aimed at analyzing about organic food products with sample of 93 members. Which has helped in getting an overall view of the organic food products. It was evident from the study most of the respondents are satisfied with the organic food products. However some of the respondents were not preferring organic products based on the study following suggestions are proposed.

- ❖ Respondents are feeling that using organic food product is good but it is not affordable for all. Increase the advertisement and availability of the product in the grocery stores
- ❖ It is found that there are few respondents still dissatisfied with pricing of the organic food products. Hence market has to give cheaper pricing which will help producers to increase the sales.
- ❖ Consumption of organic food products regularly .Its healthier for the consumers and they get better immune system

CONCLUSION

From the analysis, it is concluded that monthly income, area of residence, family status, duration of consumption, level of awareness on organic foods and state of health are associated with consumer positive attitude towards organic foods. The consumers are to be more careful on the adverse impact of consuming conventional foods. Conventional foods cultivated using pesticides resulted in piling up of many feared diseases, which are incurable. A certain section of consumers are not aware of the adverse effects of Conventional foods and on the other hand certain sections of consumers are not preferring organic foods, due to the high cost involved though they are highly aware of its health benefits as such Government agencies, cooperative societies and other agricultural organizations have to take necessary food steps in creating awareness among common public on the advantages of consuming organic foods and extent needed assistance to cultivate high quantum of organic foods by the majority of the farmers .by encouraging people to consume non poisonous organic products a strong foundation may be let down for the future healthy generation.

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